

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

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SMITH: URBAN SCHOOL CORPORATIONS SHOULD THINK OF FILING EQUITY SUIT

INDIANAPOLIS -- In light of recent cuts in school funding and additional proposals that would take away even more money from traditional public schools, State Rep. Vernon G. Smith (D-Gary) is suggesting that urban school corporations may need to consider filing an equity suit.

"The proposed funding cuts and legislation under consideration that would shift money from traditional public schools to charter schools is creating inequality in school funding," said Smith. "Urban school districts that are already dealing with decaying buildings and equipment shortages, not to mention potentially disruptive influences from drugs and gangs, will now have to fight for equal funding from the state."

Gov. Mitch Daniels has recently withheld \$52 million from schools for 2005. This was not extra money for the schools, but funds that had already been budgeted for teachers' salaries, class equipment and maintenance for school buildings. The budget cut comes on top of a budget freeze for all schools for the next two years.

In addition, Gov. Daniels is also trying to get rid of minimum guarantees for school funding. A minimum guarantee would ensure that a school district would get a certain amount of money, even if they have a declining student population. Without this money, class sizes will increase, necessary building repairs and additions will be delayed and teachers will lose their jobs.

"The governor feels that school funding should follow the students," Smith said. "This would favor suburban school districts, schools that traditionally draw financial support from a broad tax base and do not face the financial shortages of urban school districts. Also, the minimum guarantees make sure that a school has enough money to pay operational costs, such as salaries for staff and teachers, utilities costs and basic maintenance. These are constant costs and are not fully depend."

House Bill 1009 also poses a threat to adequate funding for traditional public schools in Indiana. This bill would shift money away from traditional public schools to fund charter schools.

"It seems to me that Gov. Daniels is showing how very little he cares for the students of Indiana's urban school corporations," said Smith. "These are students that have to work much harder to get to school, to learn, to graduate. They often do not enjoy the financial and academic supports that suburban students have. By decreasing funding for these schools, the governor is making their struggle for education all the more difficult."

Smith would like to remind Gov. Daniels that it is the responsibility of the state to educate all students.

"Article 8 of the Indiana State Constitution guarantees education for all in Indiana," said Smith. "However, the state is ignoring its duty and trying to pass off this obligation solely onto the communities of Indiana. Sadly, it seems that it will be necessary for the urban school districts of Indiana to file suit in order to receive equal funding for their schools. That appears to be the only way the governor will listen."